Title: Select Plays of Mahesh Dattani: A Gendered Approach

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The proposed dissertation will seek to examine the treatment of gender issues and gender relations in select plays of Mahesh Dattani(b.1958), the versatile dramatist of India. During the early 1970s the concept of gender was used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours and competencies, which are then assigned as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Thus a sex/gender distinction is affirmed and it argues that the actual physical or mental effects of biological differences had been exaggerated to maintain the mechanism of a patriarchal society. However, recent writings on sex and gender suggest that the meanings attached to sex differences are themselves socially constructed and changeable, in that we understand them and attach different consequences to these biological 'facts' within our own cultural historical contexts. More recent gene research also indicates that biology does contribute to some behavioural characteristics and the example of research on transgendered individuals reinforces this(given that many transgendered people characterize their sense of something being wrong with them as being trapped in the wrong body).

In fact, gender has been defined in numerous contexts by feminist scholars, from an attribute to a type of social organization and as an ideology to sex roles, power differentials, and analytic categories. Gender is the key to how we identify people, organize relationships with others, and develop meaning through natural and social events. In this perspective the proposed dissertation will attempt to explore Mahesh Dattani's concerns on gender as one of the most significant determining principle of individual existence in society.

Being a brilliant Indian dramatist who has chosen English as the medium, Mahesh Dattani has startled the audience by his representation of radical and unconventional issues on the stage. He has shown great social awareness and concern for the long suppressed, unrecognized, marginalized human beings through his plays. He deals with the theme of sexuality and gender issues, the predicament of eunuchs and homosexuals. The hollowness, pettiness and ugliness of modern age have been brought forth by Dattani in almost all his plays.

The principal objective of the proposed work is to examine the treatment of gender issues and gender relationships in select plays of Mahesh Dattani in order to identify his unconventional and humanitarian concerns towards the suppressed and marginalized genders living in the patriarchal society. The distinction between women and men is not just a straightforward division between two separate but equal categories, or natural kinds. This distinction implies an understanding of man as the ideal. That which is characteristically female or feminine is generally regarded as inferior to that which is characteristically male or masculine. As a result, women are in a contradictory situation such that meeting cultural expectations regarding ideal femininity would automatically mean failing to meet cultural expectations regarding the human

ideal, and meeting cultural expectations regarding the human ideal would mean failing to meet cultural expectations of ideal femininity.

This kind of categorization leads to the acceptance of the twofold belief, first, that women and men are quite different from one another and, second, that the fundamental differences between women and men are attributable primarily to biology. In addition to referring to biological kinds, however, 'women' and 'men' are sometimes understood to refer to what biologically male and female human beings become as the result of gender socialization. According to this second usage, 'women' and 'men' are categories that exist at the intersection of nature and nurture. In yet a third usage, 'women' and 'men' are regarded as purely social or experimental categories. Thus the terms 'women' and 'men' sometimes designate sex, they sometimes designate gender, and they sometimes designate the product of both sex and gender.

The ability to transition seamlessly from a biological conception of 'gender' to a social one reinforces the hegemonic binary, which regards gender and sex, and even sexuality, as different expressions of the same fundamental division of the human world into its most basic natural kinds. However, this culturally based binary of sex and gender is challenged by individuals born with sexually ambiguous characteristics. Their existence speaks of the complexities of the chromosomal mechanisms for determining sex in humans. These ambiguous bodies (intersexed, hermaphroditism, pseudo-hermaphroditism) do not conform to the overarching and largely taken for granted social expectations that all human beings belong to one of two clearly delineated sex categories. Moreover, traditional beliefs about gender assume that male gender identity, masculine gender roles, and sexual attraction to females are one natural and inevitable gender package, while female gender identity, feminine gender roles, and sexual attraction to males are the only other natural and inevitable gender package. And homosexuals are often assumed by heterosexuals to have the opposite gender role and gender identity.

In this patriarchal as well as heterosexual society we can find an unmistakable sense of solidarity linking concern about women's issues and concern about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. This solidarity seems born of a deep understanding that the oppression of women and the suppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender existence in this patriarchal society are deeply intertwined. Feminist identity, like LGBT identity stretches the boundaries of established categories of gender, sex, and sexuality.

These issues find a significant place in the dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani. He emerges as a sensitive writer whose genuine concern for marginalized gendered sections of society like women, gays, lesbians, as well as third gender people is reflected through the wonderful plays. He sees his work as a mirror of his time and place which is a part of contemporary Indian society. This is a profoundly patriarchal and heterosexual society. In this society women have to face gender biased attitude which consider them inferior to men, as we see in the plays like *Tara*, or *Bravely Fought the Queen*; homosexuals have to bear a stigmatized existence, as the plays like *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, or *Do the Needful* show us; third gender people have to lead cursed as well as segregated lives, as *Seven Steps Around the Fire* illustrates. Even men, who cannot project an ideal of so-called manhood in their characters, become insignificant in this conservative society, as *Dance Like a Man* suggests.

In this context a number of plays are chosen to examine how Dattani addresses the issues related to gender and gender relationships: stage plays like *Where There's A Will* (1988), *Dance*

Like a Man (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1992-93), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*(1998), *Thirty Days in September* (2001), and *Where Did I Leave My Purdah* (2012); radio plays like *Do the Needful* (1997), *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (1998), *The Tale of a Mother Feeding Her Child* (2000), *Uma and the Fairy Queen* (2003), and *A Girl Who Touched the Stars* (2007); and a screen play namely *Ek Alag Mausam* (2005). In these plays Dattani portrays different facets gender issues faithfully and realistically.

The concerns regarding gender and gender relationships expressed in these dramas can be tentatively classified into six thematic areas, each of which will correspond to a chapter in the proposed work. And the first chapter will contain a discussion on the Indian English drama and the contribution of Mahesh Dattani. This chapter will discuss how Indian drama in English has been developing and the importance of Mahesh Dattani's contribution to it. At the same time the concept of gender and related issues will be discussed generally. The second chapter will analyze the position of women in the Indian patriarchal society along with different facets of their lives in some of the plays by Dattani. The third chapter will discuss how Dattani delineates the horrible picture of sexual violence in his plays. The next three chapters will analyze Dattani's conception of those women who inculcate the patriarchal values and seek to perpetuate this system, how Dattani focuses on the limitations of the stereotypical image of manhood through his drama, and the problematic situation of the homosexuals within the oppressive heterosexual social mechanism. Thus the proposed work seeks to form a comprehensive gendered approach to Mahesh Dattani's select plays which will depart from previous scholarship in a number of ways.

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